

Shortgrassers Have To Accept Fact That Jet Age Has Arrived

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MERTZON — The trend toward urbanization is gradually taking hold, even out here. The Shortgrass Country is still a rural region, yet the old ways are passing on to make way for the progressive age.

Great gains could be made if the ranchers would cast off their narrow views. But herders cling to the idea that just because sheep and cattle ranching made the settlement and survival of the district possible, the agriculture industry need not have a minor role in the community structure. As stuffed steer herds have disappeared from the lobbies of the banks and the ranch atmosphere has been swept from the hotels, these hardheads have doggedly contended that without the dollars from the livestock game the land would be as void of hope as a lineup of a smooth mouth chorus girls.

Recently, a community center was built here in Mertzon. In the hubbub of the promotion accompanying the project, leaders and supporters of the 4-H Club (and that outfit is infested with livestock supporting fanatics) had the nerve to propose that once a year the building should be used to hold the county stock show. Guided by their one track purpose to help kids, these busybodies had the gall to ask the Commissioner's Court for permission to stage an exhibition that would obviously re-link the town back to the days when four-legged animals were staked and penned all over the townsite.

Similar to all crusaders, they became so blinded by their plan they failed to realize that a three or four hour parade of show lambs across a sanded arena in the morning would contaminate the building's atmosphere until midafternoon of the same day. Under the spell of their selfish aims, they forgot what might happen if a big city tourist happened to stop in and catch a whiff of sheep odor in a West Texas town.

More important, the 4-Hers couldn't see that times are changing. The nostrils of what were once country people, and are now town residents are offended by the smell of woolies. Things were different 20 years ago. Today, a herder had better check his work boots on the way to town or he'll find himself classified in the same category as an orangutan.

Oh, I know a major portion of the public buildings in the Shortgrass Country were built by sheep and cow money. It is true that the agriculture community has played a part in every phase of the area's commerce and good works. For that matter, the source of the funds to build the community center can be traced back to the rangelands. But that still doesn't mean that a bunch of sheep-tending kids and their parents should be treated like, say, a bridge club or sewing circle. Cards and thimbles have never been known to affect the olfactory organs, and that's more than you can say for county agents and sheepmen.

There are no ifs nor ands about what needs to be done. The time has arrived for the jet age. We herders and country people might as well move aside and hope that when the moon is settled we will be welcome up there.